

Mayor's Council on Disability  
Chattanooga, Tennessee  
Meeting Minutes  
July 13, 2009

John Jackson, Chairperson  
Bryon Kluesner, Vice Chair  
Carol Martin, Secretary  
Jill Hindman, Parliamentarian

Council Members

Sandra Booher, Moccasin Bend Hospital  
Jim Queen, CARTA Care-A-Van  
Tommy Gates, Siskin Hospital for Physical Rehabilitation  
Carolyn Boyd, Signal Centers  
Phillip Stevens, City of Chattanooga  
Karl Epperson  
Nichol Myers, AIM Center  
Robert White  
Katie Jones, Merrill Lynch

Mayor's Office Participants

Matt Lea, Assistant to Mayor  
Jay Piercy, OMA City Compliance Officer  
Kathie Fulgham, Mayor's Office

Visitors

Jennifer Nichols, Signal Centers	Heather Chang, UTC Student
Michelle Riegler, UTC Disability Office	Holly Zuckerman, UTC Student
Chris Jackson, TN DMRS	Elaine Adams, City Therap. Rec.
Bea Lyons, Chattanooga State (Retired)	Alex, Intern, City Therap. Rec.
Sidney McDonald, Bijou Theater	

Absent

Sandra Booher, excused  
Jim Queen, excused  
Carolyn Boyd, represented by Terri Rice  
Nichol Myers

John welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Council members to introduce themselves.

The minutes were approved as written.

John asked Bryon Kluesner to discuss the UTC Disability Office's Goodwill Ambassador Trip. Bryon said that due to technical difficulties, the three minute teaser video could not be shown but it will be available for the August meeting.

He then introduced three trip participants – Holly Zuckerman, Heather Chang and Michelle Riegler. Michelle told the Council that the group appreciated its support for their trip. Because most of the trip participants were people with disabilities, there was much planning required. They chose destination locations based upon the belief that these places had an extremely successful culture of inclusion of people with disabilities.

The destinations included Fiji, New Zealand and Australia. They found that although many places may not have been as physically accessible as the U.S, the cultural attitudes of inclusion were more impressive than in the U.S. According to Michelle, "They considered us as 'family', part of their 'tribe'. They made sure that regardless of the disability, each person participated completely in activities. For instance, in Fiji, there are no accessibility laws, but rather a mission statement that is very inclusive. The transportation for people with disabilities is called Project Mobility. Transportation is just a phone call away. When they were called from the airport, they arrived in five minutes.

In New Zealand, the urban areas were definitely more physically accessible, but even the rural areas were accessible. The charter company they used had purchased accessible equipment, which has paid off. Most tours are going with this company now. Their buses had been up to code but since their passengers in wheelchairs were not comfortable, they renovated their entire fleet.

According to Michelle, "In Sydney, Australia, every fourth taxi was accessible. When we went to a taxi stop, one arrived for us right away. At one of the tourist attractions the guide was from the outback. When he noticed that some of the participants were blind, he started to describe things so that the blind participants could fully appreciate the experience." There were 33 people that went. The bathrooms on some of the airlines such as Qantas and Fiji Airlines were pretty large or had lifts. In Australia, the tour guide gave the students a wheelchair accessible map of public bathrooms.

Michelle continued, "The feeling of inclusion on this trip was so great that many of the students said they felt they belonged there more than they do in the U.S. We had a little person with us and she said that for the first time in her life she felt as if she 'belonged'. There were 33 people that went. The contacts with people with disabilities were not pre arranged. We did not want any contrived situation. We also prepared our strong advocate students not to be too vocal about any criticism they may have had. We explained that we were observing the culture, not trying to change it."

One of the Council members asked, "Why do you think these cultures are so much more inclusive? What has happened there that has changed their culture?" Michelle responded that she thinks the US culture is the problem, is the culture that has changed. Although the US has the laws, the spirit of the laws is missing. These countries focus more on the human side instead of the legal side. They don't have the Americans with Disabilities Act. They don't worry about getting sued. They just do what they think is the right thing to do. To them each member of the group was considered one of the tribe, the family.

Discussion continued about how the U.S. can get to this level of inclusion. One of the Council members wondered if the U.S. spirit of individuality may be part of the problem. Another member said that "the tribe" can be strongest when everyone's strengths are recognized.

Michelle said that the purpose of this project is to teach us how to get to where these countries are. She feels that the laws intimidate people; they fear being politically incorrect. On this trip, they noticed that people had no trouble just asking the person with the disability what they preferred. They were very focused on the person, not the disability. Michelle said that they have hours of video that they are going through to prepare a documentary so they can demonstrate how other cultures include people with disabilities.

The Council members congratulated the group on the good work they were doing and said they were looking forward to seeing the documentary. To view the teaser video, go to [www.utc.edu/osd](http://www.utc.edu/osd)

John asked Kathie Fulgham for an update on Go!Fest. Kathie said that the Times Free Press and Channel 9 will be media sponsors. She added that the team working behind the scenes is working well together and everything is moving along.

Next on the agenda was The Assistive Technology for Seniors Exhibit that is being presented by Signal Centers. Terri Rice introduced Jennifer Nichols of Signal Centers who has been working on this exhibit. Jennifer asked that the fliers be distributed and asked each of us to spread the word. Assistive Technology for Seniors will be Thursday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> from 12:30 p.m. until 3:00p.m. There will be lots of vendors present. There will be high tech and low tech devices. There will also be lots of door prizes.

Terri Rice said she wanted to plug this event by explaining how much assistive technology has helped her cope with her disability of deafness and blindness. She said it took a lot of fear away knowing what is available to her. Terri said that as we age, many of us will lose our vision or our hearing or a little of both. She said Signal Centers received an independent living grant that allows them to provide this assistive technology to people over 55 years who cannot afford it.

Katy Jones welcomed Jennifer back to the Council. Jennifer was

one of the original Council members.

John asked Matt Lea if the Mayor had appointed anyone else to the vacant positions on the Council yet. Matt said he had not.

Elaine Adams, Therapeutic Recreation for the City, introduced Alex, an intern that is working with her for the summer. She discussed Club Venture which will consist of rock climbing, canoeing and disk golf for all ages. It starts Wednesday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> with rock climbing as the first event. The young adult group is called Chillin Like Villains. There are already 50 people who have signed up. Family and friends are welcome. This Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup> from 8 until 3 will be the adaptive water sports day. This is predominantly for people with disabilities. It is at Possum Creek. There will be water skiing, jet skiing, tubing, boat rides and kayaking – all free and lunch is provided. Attendees must pre-register.

Jill Hindman said there was nothing new on the Stigma project. She said that the Home Builders Association is working on a Visibility Project to encourage builders to join in and build more housing for people with disabilities. Jill said a builder in Nashville has built a development that has two pools, an adult pool and a kiddy pool, both with ramp systems that allow people using wheelchairs to get in the pool. The homes are custom built with the accommodations requested by the buyer. The price range is \$150,000 to \$250,000. Jill also said that she was not reappointed to the state Developmental Disability Council. She believes this is a result of her complaints about restrooms in the state buildings a couple of years ago that became a political embarrassment to the Council.

Jill said that the Region 3 Developmental Disability Council (which is different from the state council) will meet on August 4<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. She said she is checking with the Criminal Justice Committee of this Council to see if a representative can speak to the Mayor's Council on Disability.

Phillip Stevens had no inquiries on the web site this month but did get a few phone calls about Go!Fest. He also has the Senior Assistive

Technology Expo flyer posted.

Matt Lea announced that the Mayor will be at the next meeting to make a presentation to the UTC students that traveled with the Disability Office.

John asked for the visitors to introduce themselves. One of the visitors, Sidney, who was invited by Karl Epperson, said he was very impressed with the meeting. On the subject of inclusion that was discussed earlier, he added that attitudes of people with disabilities are very important too. Doing his jobs, he has learned that a sense of humor is important. He said that he thinks Chattanooga has improved a lot but needs to continue. Sidney added that discussion about cultural inclusion must take place outside this Council meeting.

Heather Chang, UTC, said that the Disability Office is planning another trip next summer to Ireland, Scotland, and England. The Australia trip cost \$4,000 for students and \$4,400 for those over 23 years old. They fund raised for a year. Next year's trip will be about \$2,300 and will last for 12 days.

Matt Lea announced that he will be speaking about wild birding at Alexian Brothers on July 25<sup>th</sup>. Contact Matt if you would like more information.

Terri Rice announced that Hamilton County Schools have raised money to contribute to the sponsorship of a Goodwill Service Dog. She also said that she and Sandy Booher have started a support group for people who have guide dogs. They meet the first Saturday of every month at 2:00 o'clock at Sandy's art studio on Vine Street.

Chris Jackson announced that the Department of Mental Retardation Services or DMRS will be renamed Department of Intellectual Disabilities.

Karl said the City Council needs to look into getting more accessible taxis in Chattanooga. He also discussed a PBS program entitled, Angels in School about grades K – 3 that had 12 students in each

class with 3 of these students blind. The kids help each other and learn to be very inclusive.

Jill suggested that the Mayor's Council could visit the schools and discuss disabilities. She said educating the young people is the best way to change the culture.

Karl said that Fuller Rehab will not be able to provide wheelchairs for this year's Go!Fest due to liability concerns. He also thanked Sidney for coming. Karl then apologized for his comment to Miss Howard, a visitor at last month's meeting, for his comment to her during that meeting.

Jill said that regarding accessible taxis, a CARTA employee is on the taxi board and she is working to make taxis more accessible. The Millennium Taxis have said they can accommodate manual chairs.

Michelle Riegler commented that the accessible taxis that they saw on their trip were not high tech. For example, a ramp in the back may be pulled out when needed.

John announced that the next meeting will be August 3, 2009 at 3:00 at the DRC.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Carol Martin, Secretary  
Mayor's Council on Disability